

THE MANGLED RAVEN

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Editor's Note: The following introduction to the Automynorcagrammatical Raven is taken from a letter from JAL to Howard Bergeron, himself the contributor of a similar construction to Word Ways in November 1975. In an Automynorcagram, the initial letters of the successive words repeat the original message.

I sha'n't say much about this. I'd never heard of an automynorcagram - and I hope I'll never hear of one again! - and I just don't see the point of writing under such a crippling restriction, when the restriction adds nothing positive of value; to me it seems just wasted effort. Mind you, I admire your wonderful skill, especially the way in which you have managed to keep to the original stanza by stanza. I wasn't able to match this. I read only the first couple of stanzas of your version, just to get the general idea, then put it aside and got on with my own version. Mine turned out to be shorter, perhaps more direct and easily understandable, but less poetic and a whole lot further away from the original. Both versions seem a bit silly here and there to me. Of course, not having done anything of the sort before, I paid no attention while writing the opening few stanzas, to the letters I was using, and so simply could not say what I wanted to say later on. However, such as it is, I pass it on to you. Do what you like with it ...

Night in gloomy house. Trouble-filled, I nurse
 Ghost-lingering likeness of one maiden yet.
 Heaven or Underworld snaps every trump.
 Reading old useless books, loom eerie fancies
 I languidly let enter, dream, ignore
 New unlocated rapping sounds, ere get
 Hint of some true late idler. Nevermore!

Gold embers rustle into numberless
 Gleams. Lamp, inglenook, kingly ease. New ember
 Scintillating, spluttering over floor.
 O nobly ends my Aidenn in December!
 Ever numb, yearning, enfolding trauma,
 Hope ends, actions vainglorious efface
 No oracle, ribs utter, "Nevermore!"

Dungeonlike evil rappings! Wind -- or rain.
 Limp-hanging draperies shiver, neatly aligned
 Pale-purple silk embodies -- visitor?

(Evading Reason's yielding toe-hold, rude
Upperarms mangle, press ...) Raps ebb again,
Dully, in Night's ghost-terrain of Lenore.
Does Utter Silence end life evermore?

Snapping severe bolts open: "O kind Sir"
(Looking outside) "or Madam -- enter, enter!
Rest, I entreat -- freely apologise.
Now come in, enter, Sir! I let a noise
Graduate unattended. I deplore
Leaving you long excluded, turning eyes."
Naught there, e'en raps. Darkness reigned evermore.

At midnight I grow nervous, oftentimes
Repulsing every new experience.
With utter nothingness ("Lenore?") outside,
Came ambient terrors -- evidence denied
Revealed a purpose! Pure-browed Innocence,
Now gone, Shadow of Underworld near door?
Sound, echoing, reverberates evermore.

Gravitating eventually to
Hearthrug, I numbly try oblivious
Fancies, sleep-cosseting old memories,
Ere tomblike rappings untomb e'en Lenore!
Analyse the environment I do.
Lattice excluding raindrops, now excess?
Vexed, even rain may oft rap evermore.

Get open lattice-window. Dourly enters
My backroom ebon Raven. Stately Raven,
Unruffled, steps through lattice easily,
Inspires no trepidation, openly
Nests upon marble bust. (Excelsior!)
Resembles living ebony, scarce stirs,
Glows luciferously evermore.

A marble statuette -- (Lightheartedly:)
A marble Pallas! "Is Night's Gloomy Lord
Erebus named, or Old King Kohl?" I nicker.
"Give, Lord, your Erebusian appellation.
Such evident nocturnal evil we
Elaborately misconstrued before."
Egged, Raven sourly croaks in, "Nevermore!"

Though I lay laughing (and -- the impious notion! --
Glimpsed serene Pallas laughing under this
Tongued Erebusian Raven) I now grew
Overly vapid, e'en' ridiculous,
Found laughter out of reason on Night's ocean
By lost Youth's ever-shut necrotic door;
Stifled my yawns, as I do evermore.

Named Nevermore, it'll ne'er more depart?
 Else cannot ever marble bust endow!
 "Rudely exasperating visitor,
 Enrooted Raven, nervily upstart
 My bones. You even are retiring now
 Into Night's gulf? Each new friend (or Lenore)
 Disintegrates, intoning "Nevermore!"

Gritted the Raven, acid-tongued, upon
 Marble Athene, hunching over Pallas,
 Eternally explicit, "Nevermore!"
 Did some adversity-condemned cohabiter
 Teach it once "Nevermore", some victim as
 Infernal Night glowered Lucifer-eyed on,
 Reserving it one urn song evermore?

Fastidiously flung at cushioned ease,
 Night-garbed on ornate rich Aragonese
 Chaise-longue, languidly eying Raven, I
 Babbled subliminally under these
 Thought-bubbles, even ruminating nigh
 Ethereal vaults, ere Raven's malice or
 Resurgent Evil dirged up "Nevermore!"

Gloom entering: "O nevermore Lenore
 I'll know ere empty velvet-violet
 Impressionable lining renders all
 Personal presences (it now gives shell
 Wholly invisible) new density!
 O ruthless Raven, anguishedly I'll net
 Life in my pallid hands, ah, nevermore!"

Ghastly! It now grew dimmer, royal and
 Perfume-rich exhalations reeling in,
 Eminently suggesting Seraphim,
 Heavenly incense, valedictory
 Effusions, rising nebulosity . . .
 "Easy amnesia towards Lenore,
 Young Angel love?" -- Imp grated, "Nevermore!"

"Embittered Devil, prophet availing little!
 Enraging prophet, using Raven's prattle!
 Let evermore such incarnations languish!
 Kindly enlighten me, balm-bird or devil,
 Is everlasting solace vowed in store?
 Is taste of rue eternal, venomed anguish?
 Do I not gain remission evermore?"

"Avaunt, Satanic Owl! Night's Solitaire!
 Youth into Everlastingness -- Lenore!
 Demon in night-veil, ghastly thing of evil,
 Hope of Lenore doth reign unceasing, Devil!"

Empty unbidden Prophet -- peace! Earth's rare
 And radiant maid shall mean all!" -- "Nevermore!"
 "Gone? Lost?" -- Ends prophet Raven: "Evermore!"

"Sardonic Swartback! Rout a presence so
 Empalled, bust-shaming bird, and ghost austere
 Into Night's dim unworld! Lenore, Lenore!
 Youth into nothingness, nonentity,
 Invisibility! Go hence, tarred seer!
 Go hence, obtrusive seer, to Timbuktu!
 E'en rise!" -- Raven an icy "Nevermore!"

On floor lies ebon nebula of Raven,
 Eternal darkness over Earthdom spread.
 (Untimely tombed?) This evil Raven's shade
 Is lying ever now, covering even
 Each new-awakened day, lying instead
 For ever, ever -- vilely -- evermore!
 Room mourns on. Raven ends shade nevermore.

SATIRE : VERITAS

All advance orders for this long palindrome by David Stephens have now been filled at \$4 apiece; because of higher-than-anticipated publishing costs, it is necessary to charge \$5 for future orders in order to break even. Two errors in the palindrome should be corrected: on the first line of page 5, 'mood-madder' should be 'moon-madder', and on page 54 'Monetgo' should be 'Montego'.